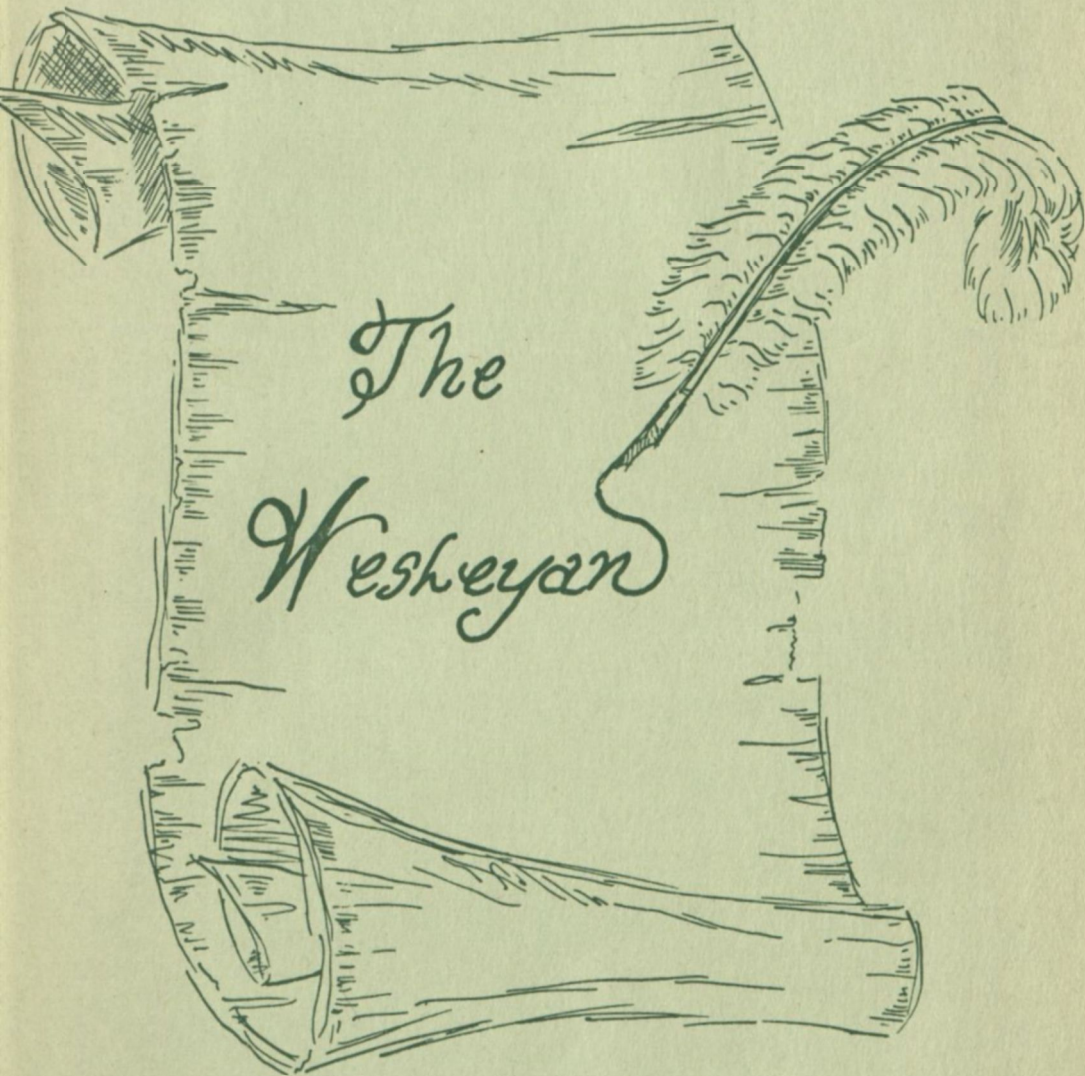


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THE WESLEYAN

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Table of Contents

TO DR. JOHNSON	LOUISE SMITH
SATURDAY CURLS	SHEILA RUBEL
ANOTHER DAY ANOTHER	MADGE HILL
MY BLIND DATE	DONNIE DONALDSON
LAUREL	PEGGY STILES
I'M GONNA BE RICH	JODY MANN
COME BACK, COME BACK	SARA THURSTON

To Dr. Johnson

*You can see him now
Walking along the narrow road
Head erect, shoulders back, eyes looking forward—this the last and final
bend.*

*To us who knew him—loved him—admired his efforts—
For him we have no fear.*

*We look back—remember his soft voice—pleasant eyes—kindly smile—
His winning manner.*

*He gave his best—his thoughts, actions, hopes were dedicated to Wesleyan's
future.*

*Now in the distance he sees the final bend
The road—which at times was rugged—filled with barriers—craigs,—
ditches
Is smooth and level now*

*He is walking with a slightly quickened step—anxious,—alert—
Wondering what shall be found at this last turn.*

*He is barely distinguishable
The shadows of late evening descend upon this disappearing figure—
He is no longer seen.*

*We know—all of us who loved him know—
That beyond the bend in this Road of Life—upon which he traveled—
ever onward—*

He will find his Eternal Home.

—LOUISE SMITH

*I dream and hope now,
 Yet there will come a day
 When each dream shall rise
 And walk away with all the hope of my life and eternity.
 I wait and wonder,
 Confused and afraid
 'Til you will come like a warm current in a cool stream
 And envelope with warmth and light and love
 My barren heart.*

—SALLY ROGERS

IF YOU KNOW

*If you know of one
 Who lives happily
 In an illusion,
 Tell him not of it.
 Neither let him know
 That you know.
 He would only hate you
 For knowing it.
 That doesn't matter.
 What does—
 Is that disillusion is worse.*

—LIBBY GLENN

NIGHT SONG

*Darkness folds about me.
 Night wraps me in a cloak of solitude,
 But in the rustling folds of night
 I hear a song,
 A strange unearthly refrain.
 My heart pounds with maddening force seeking recollection,
 But then the strange chant ceases,
 And I am standing cold and alone in the darkness
 With only the haunting melody echoing down the corridor
 Of my soul.*

—JEAN THRASHER

Love is like an elevator; you're either going up or coming down.
 —P. Stiles.

Saturday Curls

SHEILA RUBEL

I ain't much on lookin' purty, but come Saturday, I like 't git m' hair done up . . . been doin' it fer years. George and I git into the '38 Ford, and off we go t' Crosstown, 'bout 40 mile from Jedborough County, where we live. I always lived in North Carolina . . . ain't never been out a' th' state..

I always go t' Newton's Dept. Store t' git m' hair done up, 'cause they



don't charge so much as one a' thim private beauty saloons. Got a reg'lar Saturday appointment . . . Alice Newcombe . . . big fat girl . . . she always does it fer me.

While I'm gittin' done up, George goes t' th' markit t' sell th' corn 'n' yams. We got a farm . . . ain't a big place . . . don't always have 'nough fer a real nice new dress a' some thin' fancy . . . but I always git m' \$1.35 fer m' shampoo 'n' settin'. . . . George 'n' I jes know that's m' money t' spend on m' Satur-

day curls . . . thut's whut George calls 'em. When we figure out th' week's money, he jes' takes th' money 'n' puts it in a little cup thut sits right on a little shelf over th' stove, 'n' I know there's m' money fer m' settin' . . . jes' 'bout have 'nough too . . .

While George is sellin' th' corn 'n' yeller yams, Cassie . . . thut's m' daughter . . . she goes into Bamburger's Dept. Store 'n' jes stays there a'lookin' 'round at everythin'.

When I git m' hair all done up, George is waitin' fer me in the '38 Ford. He don't say nuthin when he sees me with m' hair fixed . . . jes' kinda smiles 'n' I know whut he thinks . . . kinda makes a woman glad t' be alive . . . I always feel more alive when m' hair is fresh done up than at any other time. M' nose don't look so long . . . n' people in th' streets a' Crosstown sometimes look at me when I go by . . . makes me feel

good . . . almost like one a them movie stars . . . ya know havin' people look at ya? . . . jes' somethin' diffrent 'bout me when I git m' hair done up . . . jes' don't feel th' same . . . I even walk quicker . . . don't see whut walkin's got ta do with yer hair . . . but all th' same I do walk quicker. George and me git our week's shoppin' done in Crosstown, we go t'the Dept. Store 'n' pick up Cassie. Cassie's always lookin' at dresses 'n' we always know jes where t' find her. Once we git Cassie, we all go t' git coco colas, n'n start back t' Jedbrough County.

Now, how come I's tellin' all this, is 'cause it all started one Sataday, when we all went inta Crosstown. Everythin' was usual . . . I got m' hair done . . . 'n' I'm feelin' real good . . . we do our shoppin', 'n' then we go t' find Cassie . . . I cain't find Cassie . . . I looks, 'n' I looks, . . . finally I finds Cassie.

"Cassie, whut a ya doin' here?"

"Jes lookin' at th' pictures," she says.

"But whut fer ya' lookin' at th' pictures . . . this here's a real expensive hair shop . . . I don't git m' hair done up here . . ."

"Jes lookin' Maw."

The next Saturday, Cassie didn't come inta Crosstown with us . . . she wint swimmin' with Hilda, one a her friends. Thut was th' first time Cassie didn't go inta town with us . . . even when she was real little we took her with us . . . 'cause there t'weren't no place t' leave her . . . 'n' now at 15 . . . she . . . well she had t' growup some time . . . When George 'n' me gits home thut night . . . there's Cassie a'sittin' on the th' steps—on'y it's a diffrent Cassie. She's got a great big smile fer us . . . not thut Cassie didn't never smile much, but this wuz a diffrent smile . . . I knows how come one smile don't look like another on m' Cassie.

"Maw, Maw," she says, runnin' up t' me. "Guess whut?"

"Yeah, whut is it Cassie?" I says, winkin' at George. I knows whut it is "Whut a'yer so iksited 'bout?" I acted real surprised, like I don't know whut she's gonna tell me.

"I . . . I got a feller t' take me t' th' movies, next Sataday night."

"Naw," George says, real amazed.

"Now, ain't that somethin'?" I smiles at her "Who?"

"Ned," she answers, twistin' her straight hair round her fingers. "We met him swimmin' in th' creek, 'n' he likes me 'n' . . ." she starts t' git red.

"Old Barney's son," says George. "Well now, there's a nice catch."

"Ya know George I says, a' settin' on th' steps a' th' house, . . . I sit on th' broke step, so I git up 'n' sit on th' next one.

"Ya know it's 'bout time Cassie fetched her-self a man . . . old 'nough now 't git started lookin' round . . . good thing ya wint swimmin' today."

"Now hold on there Maw. We don't want our kid hitched up yet." George sits next t' me.

"No, but she's gotta git t' know people . . . how else is she gonna know when th' right feller come her way? Whut are ya' gonna wear, Cassie?"

"My purty dress, with th' lace collar . . . on'y Maw . . . I wuz wonderin' if . . ." 'n' agin she stands 'n' twists her straight hair 'round her fingers.

All of us got straight hair . . . good thing George is got 'nough money fer me t' keep mine curly.

"Yeah Cassie?" I says gittin up 'n' goin' the back-yard. We don't never go into th' house from the front . . . like t' keep it clean fer comp'ny . . . like Cassie's first date . . . Ned . . . least I know we got one real purty lookin' fancy room.

"Maw," Cassie follows me into th' kitchen.

"George, I call, pokin' m' head out the kitchen window, "Bring in the groc'ries first, will ya?"

"Maw, I . . ."

"Cassie, git out th' flour, so's I kin start the pancakes." I goes t' the ice-box and gits out th' milk. Cassie hands me th' flour.

"Maw I . . ."

"Beat up some eggs, Cassie."

"Maw, I want t' git m' hair done up on Sataday, same as you do."

I nearly drops th' flour can, but I don't. I turn t' Cassie real slow like, and I don't know how I feel inside, but suddenly I ache in m' stomuk.

"Cassie I . . ."

"Oh, Maw," she says, real iksited. "It'd mean so much t' me. I'd look so purty, and ya' said yerself ya wanted me t' git t' know boys . . . and, . . . well gee Maw, m' hair's so straight!"

"Well,, Cassie, didn't Ned take a fancy t' ya, without yer hair all fixt up?" I sits on th' chair, 'cause I don't feel up t' standin'.

"Yeah, but I want other boys to take a fancy t' me, 'n' I jes' ain't purty this way . . . gosh Maw, could ya' see me with curls and a little lipstick?"

"Lipstick, Cassie?"

"Sure Maw," she goes on talkin' awful fast. "I'd have t' wear it, if I got t' date any more . . . but Maw I jes' caint fetch a man with m'hair like this."

I looks at m' Cassie, 'n' I blinks real hard. I ain't cryin', mind ya. I jes' cain't talk.

"Well, Cassie . . . I . . . I don't know. Ya know how hard yer Paw works, 'n' we ain't got much t' spare when it comes t' money, 'n' I . . . I jes' don't know whut t' tell ya. I'll have t' talk it over with yer Paw."

I goes t' the' winder 'n' calls George in. He's right surprised when I tell him.

"Sataday curls fer Cassie," George said, after a long spell a' thinkin'. "Well, Maw, taint too much we kin do . . . jes' 'bout have 'nough money fer yer Sataday curls, 'n' Maw, ya know there ain't no extra."

"Ya don't suppose we could manage t' git some more money somehow."

"Well, Maw, 'spec's I might could manage fer next week 't git it. I could charge some more fer the yellor yams."

"No, George, if we gotta have a stoppin' place we might jes' as well do it now 'n' git it done with."

I feels m' curls sudden like. M' hair was feelin' right much like straw.

Well, George, I . . . I guess I . . . I don't need t' git m'hair done up every week."

"Aw, now Maw," George comes t' me.

"Maw, do ya' mean it Maw?" Cassie's eyes light all up. "Would ya really give up yer Sataday curls, so's I could have 'em?"

"Don't see why I really need 'em. 'Sides, I already got m' man." I smiles at George, puffin' away on his cigar. "Naw . . . y' kin have m' Sataday curls."

'Sides, th' way Cassie run up 'n' kiss me, like she ain't done, since she wuz real little. Aw, Sataday curls don't mean so much as yer daughter bein' happy . . . 'sides it wuz t' help her git a man, t' git t' know people, 'n' that's whut I really wanted . . . still I had been doin' it fer years, .Alice Newcombe sure would be surprised . . . as well, it wouldn't hurt me none t'do without 'em. I blinked real hard durin' supper that night.

Come Sataday, 'n' Cassie goes over t' the little cup on th' shelf, 'n' takes out th' money fer the settin'.

"Now, ya tell Alice t' be sure t' do yer hair up real nice," I says t' Cassie, as George opens th' door t' th' truck fer her t' git out.

"Sure will Maw," she says.

I feels kinda funny seein' Cassie goin' inta Newton's Department Store. I swallows real hard . . . but I don't say nuthin'. George starts th' truck, 'n' th' motor starts puffin' . . . might a' knowd . . . always when ya got things t' do . . . it finally goes . . . 'n' it jiggles m' insides . . . but we git it workin' 'n' we drive off t' th' markit.

When we come back t' pick Cassie up, jes' t'weren't th' same child, 'n' there ain't no use in thinkin' it t'were. She looked a'mighty purty . . . no more long hair. Alice Newcombe told she's got th' kind a'face thet needs short hair . . . sure did make her face look round. Her eyes looked so blue, ya' could a'seed th' ocean in them. There t'weren't no curl in m'hair.

Thut night at supper, I wuz extra nice t' George . . . gotta keep a man in'erested when ya git older, 'n' if ya haven't got yer looks, yer got a big job on yer hand . . . it takes a heap a'lovin' t' keep a man if ya ain't purty. I kep' lookin' at George t' see if he wuz ever lookin' at m' hair. But he jes sat there, drinkin' black coffee, 'n' puffin' on his pipe.

"Cassie looks good," I says t' George, "don't she?"

"Sure do," he says, with his pipe in his month.

"George?"

"Yeah?"

"I . . . nuthin'," I's scaired t' say more.

I cain't help thinkin'. All that night, I jes lay on m' bed, 'n' think. The first time, since George 'n' I is married, thut I ain't done m'hair up. I pulls th' cover under m' chin, 'n' smells th' stuffin' in it. I looks at George, 'n' he's snorin' away Then, I's cryin' . . . I don't know why, I jes cries, 'n' I caint stop.

Silly fer a great big woman t' cry.

I jes' don't feel right, next day . . . like somethin's missin' in me. I lost m' temper 'n' yelled at Cassie when she dropped three eggs. I feel all sick

inside 'n scaired that George is gonna see how plain I am, 'n' stop lovin' me . . . I jes' couldn't stand thet. Every time I looks in th' mirror, m'nose seems to be longer then before. I put some rouge on my cheeks, 'n' go out t' th' chicken yard.

George looked at me kinda funny, when he saw it.

"Whut ya got paint on fer?" he says, a'feedin' th' chickens.

I hand him some grain. He throws it on th' ground, 'n' we watch th' chickens run t' git it.

"Looks silly, Maw, ya don't need none a that stuff on ya?"

"Don't ya like it, George?"

"'Tain't bad, but don't see why ya need it."

"Jes' thought I might." I stops cause I see Cassie comin' in th' yard with Ned.

Shee looked so purty, 'n' almost all growed up. I wiped m' hands on m' dress. I felt awful dirty, 'n' m' shoes wuz dusty. I didn't like fer Ned t' see me like thet . . . at least if I'd a had m' hair a'lookin' good it'd a been . . .

"Been swimmin'?" George asks.

I looks at Cassie 'n' everythin falls inside a'me. I cain't hardly talk.

"Cassie, Cassie, whut did ya do child?"

"Wint swimmin', Maw."

"But, Cassie, ya hair's all wet, ya ain't got no more curl?"

"Thut's all right, Maw."

"But, it's \$1.35 all thrown in the creek—yer Sataday curls, 'n' ya wint 'n' spoiled them a'fore ya got a chance t'use 'em."

George closes th' gate t' th' chicken yard. "Don't make no diffrunce if yer hair ain't got no curl long as ya have fun 'n' do whut's right."

Ned looks at Cassie standin' there in 'er bare feet, her hair in strings . . . all that money, 'n' this . . . this . . .

"Cassie how could ya go 'n' do a thing like that?" I says.

"I like 'er jes as is," says Ned.

"Sure," George says, "if ya ain't right inside, it ain't gonna matter ya look like outside."

"Maw, Maw, I kin git 'nother one next week, cain't I?"

I don't say nothin'.

Ned jes stands there a'smlin' at Cassie . . . he's got real white teeth.

I put m' hand up t' m' hair, 'n' I looks at George. He's smilin' at me jes' like Ned is smilin' on Cassie, 'n' sudden like m' heart is singin' like I wuz in church—on'y better. I ain't never felt that good even when I had m' curls . . . thet same smile on George, jes' like he used t' smile when I had m' hair done up—wuz still th' same smile. I sees Cassie with her hair all wet, hangin' on her face, 'n' Ned jes a'starin,, 'n'a' smilin' . . . Cassie, all growed up, with her own man . . . sudden like I sees I didn't need them curls no more.

"Sure wuz a waste a'money all them years, George."

"Whut wuz, Maw?"

"M' Sataday curls . . . 'n' I jes' found out somethin', George."

"Whut is it?"

"It . . . it jes don't make no diffrunce, do it, George?"

*One moon,
One lone star,
And a long stretch of white sandy beach.*

*A tall figure standing by the water's edge,
Silhouetted against the pink pathway made by the sinking sun.*

*Night is slowly falling . . .
The stage is set for the actors of night to play upon.*

*I will sit here on the beach and watch.
as the white caps roll in.*

—DORIS CHITWOOD

REVELATION

*The sun peeps forth
And sprays its rays over
The green firmament—
Daybreak*

*Sunbeams stream down
And scorch the young plants
In the parched soil—
Noon.*

*The sun tipotes away
And nestles among tall pines
In the dense forest—
Sunset.*

*Day comes with dawn
And the mysterious universe
Unfolds its treasure—
God.*

—MARTHA BIELMANN

*There was a day when sleep was rest at the end of my weary day
And tears were only from laughter.
Now is the day when my tears are as rain
Cool in their bitterness
And washing away the ache and pain
And sleep is a second death—
With dreams my only life.*

—SALLY ROGERS

Another Day, Another

By MADGE HILL

Monday, Oct. 1, 1951

Dear Daddy,

Just found two minutes and before someone assigns a test I thought I'd better write and tell you all what a wonderful time I had at home this past week end. You just don't know how nice it is to be able to crawl into bed and sleep without seventy-eleven people running in and out of the room.

Hope your cold is better by now so that your golf game won't be ruined Saturday. Know you have been busy, and that my late allowance is merely an oversight. It is the first of the month, you know. When you send it, please don't forget about the radio book I have to buy. It will cost \$8.50.

Tell Mother to write; Frank to be good, and Champ to stay out of the tulips.

Love,
MADGE

Friday, Oct. 5, 1951

Dear Daddy,

Your cold isn't worse is it? Mother said you played golf Thursday. If you can walk seven miles hitting a defenseless ball, surely you can pick up a pen and write a check for my allowance. I get hungry between meals and being broke makes it impossible to go to the Pig.

Glad to hear that Frank is doing so well on his multiplication tables. It took me weeks to learn $3 \times 3 = 9$.

Why does Champ have to have his ears clipped? I like him the way he is. Gotta go to golf.

Love,
MADGE

P. S.—Don't forget the radio book costs \$7.50.

Tuesday, Oct. 9, 1951

Daddy dear,

What's happened? What have I done to deserve being treated this way? My friends are laughing at me! I feel so left out when they go to the Pig and I can't go because I have no money. This can't go on.

Also I'm failing radio because I have no book. Miss Miller has been quite upset lately when I've had to lean over the desk to squint at Mac's book. If I get eye strain, you know what that will mean. Glasses! The lady in the book store is still holding out for "no money; no bookee", so please send my allowance plus the \$6.50 for my book.

Don't worry about Frank hitting Scrapper. I've seen the little monster and if our 3 foot 2 inch child can give him a black eye, why then, more power to him.

What's Champ doing in the hospital again?

Love,

MADGE

Saturday, Oct. 13, 1951

Dear Sir,

Please don't try to spare me any longer. I'm old enough to know the truth. I'm not your child, am I? I'm an orphan, or worse still, Mother has been married before and I'm your step child. Isn't this the truth? I couldn't be yours I know, for no loving father could treat his own child this way. And to think, I'm the first born.

I knew this would come some day, but I'll try to make a life of my own somewhere.

Goodbye,

MADGE

Wednesday, Oct. 17, 1951

Dear Daddy,

My allowance came. For that I am grateful, although the pitiful pun about "money being the root of all evil" was not funny. If you had to live on my allowance you'd see my point.

Now I ask you, where is the money for my radio book? O.K. I give up. The radio book is only \$5.50. I apologize and also this is my rock bottom estimate.

Still think Frank's running away from home is funny. Bet he had a good time riding in the police car.

If you'll remember I told you last month that Champ was going to jump the back yard fence. Being down here must have warped my sense of humor, but the idea of you in your bath robe; holding a flash light; and calling in honeyed tones, "Champ, here Champ. Nice doggie. Here boy" to a full grown boxer is just plain funny. Mother's account of it was a riot. All the girls want to meet you.

I'm serious about the money for my book.

Love,

MADGE

P.S.—Was glad to know that I'm your child after all. I don't think it was necessary to send the birth certificate, but thank you anyway.

Love,

MADGE

1951 Oct. 19, P. M. 4:30

AA 524

AANA 146 P. D. Macon, Georgia: 19 366 P

Mr. C. F. Hill

488 Pinetree Drive, N. E.

Atlanta, Georgia

JUST FAILED RADIO STOP NO BOOK STOP GOING TO END IT
ALL STOP LOVE MADGE

Monday, Oct. 22, 1951

Dear Daddy,

Thank you for the \$5.50. I bought the radio book today. Your letter was appreciated, although the part about me being melodramatic could have been left out.

Mother writes that she has tickets for the "Tales of Hoffman". If I can get away I'll be home Saturday.

Love,
MADGE

P.S.—Saw the cutest dress in Stephens yesterday. I tried hard not to buy it, but when the man said not to worry, that he'd just send the bill to you, I had to buy it. After he had gone to all that trouble, I hated to hurt his feelings.

Love again,
MADGE

Thursday, Nov. 1, 1951

Dear Daddy,

Need I remind you that it is November 1, and my allowance is due? . . .

AUTUMN

*The leaves, soft floating feet upon the wind,
Lifting, sinking, swirling to the dance,
Form first a vivid rainbow-arching blend
And then glide swiftly to their quiet rest.*

*Cool fingertips caress the loftiest tower,
Sending a sunlight mist across the air.
Glowing poplar, yellow tulip flower,
Falls the first of autumn's springlike bloom.*

*In somber minuet the leaves now form
A quilted-patterned cover o'er the sod.
Earth deeply sighs repose in sheltered warm,
And Nature dreaming curls beneath the trees.*

*The bare trees shiver from the frost-tongued gale,
And clutch their fallen cloaks around their feet.
With flailing arms that pierce low-hanging veil
They loose the powdered white sarcophagus.*

—JEAN THRASHER

Men might be like streetcars, but there's just one going my way.

—M. Hill.

My Blind Date

DONNIE DONALDSON

Something told me from the very first I shouldn't have gone. Call it lady's intuition if you will, but I knew very well that the whole thing was one, big mistake.

It all started one rainy afternoon when I was busily, if not too happily, involved in preparing my weekly theme for Dr. Gin's English lab. I had already spent half the afternoon thinking of a good beginning paragraph and now I suddenly realized that I couldn't let my main character die as I had planned because it would ruin the plot.

I was sitting there dejectedly, chewing the end of the pencil, when suddenly some freshman in cold cream and pin curls came bursting into the room, upsetting the record player (I thought some melodramatic music would put me in the proper mood for writing a theme) and turning over a chair that was in her path.

For a moment I was lost in a mad babble of words as she kept screaming to me about "a Phi Delt" and a "rush party" and "double date". After a few more minutes of shrieks and cries I realized the

child was extremely thrilled over some Mercer Phi Delt who had asked her to a "rush party", but as I had suspected, there was a reason for her sudden interest in me (one of the "dirty sophomores"!). She was a first semester freshman and she must have an upper classman as a chaperone. I was the "lucky one", as she said.

So, in spite of all my fears of going on blind dates I said okay and I'd meet her at seven-thirty in the date office. I'd know my date by his crew hair cut, she told me.

Quickly I swallowed my pride, killed the main character in my English theme, ruined the whole plot and began madly to roll up my hair.

I skipped dinner in order to polish my fingernails and press my dress. By seven o'clock my stomach was doing push-ups from hunger and I had an empty feeling from fear.

At seven-thirty on the dot the house phone rang and being afraid that



he might hear my stomach growl, my roommate took the message.

It was him, she told me. His name was Bob "Something", and he sounded "divine" over the phone!

Feeling better, I straightened my lipstick, gave me a last look to see if my stocking seams were straight and then practically ran to the date office.

In one corner sat my little freshman friend with this nothing less than six-foot, blond-haired, blue-eyed, Greek god. In the other corner sat—Bob.

I said his hair was cut in a crew? It was more like the day after army induction when presto! it all comes off. He must have been all of four feet, eleven inches, with a round face, green eyes, and a nose that looked like it had been used to kick over Notre Dame's goal post for the extra point.

After the usual introductions and witty sayings the four of us left for the rush party. On the way there I was relatively happy as I wasn't compelled to look at my date and I only spoke when spoken to.

At the party the first thing he did was to spill a cup of punch on my new dress and flick his cigarette ashes in my shoe when I tactfully removed my aching foot from it for a moment.

After the third attempt at dancing with him I begged off by saying I had a headache (actually the truth) and we sat and chatted for the remainder of the evening. Meanwhile, my little freshman friend and her Greek god were dancing romantically to the strains of "Tenderly".

Finally midnight approached and the Cinderellas had to go home. Saying goodnight to the boys and limping in to the sign-out desk, I contemplated murder when my little friend cooed, "I just had a wonderful time, didn't you?"

The moral of this story? Never go on a blind date at Wesleyan College.

WITH APOLOGIES TO MACBETH

*Yesterday, and yesterday, and yesterday,
Flies in this mad race from week to week
To the last minute of May the thirty-first.
And all our tomorrows will only prove
That you can never win. Stop, stop, swift hour!
Life's but a wailing Junior, a poor young girl
That sits and recites her hour in the class
And then is failed anyway; it is a story
Told by Me, full of self-pity and tears,
Signifying college.*

—MADGE HILL

I am innocent; you are naive; she is stupid.—M. Hill.

LAUREL

By PEGGY STILES

Laurel shivered a little in the early morning air. Occasionally a breeze would stir the mist that clung lightly to the mountains, making it swirl around Laurel like a demon lover come back to claim his mortal sweetheart. The intense silence of the mountains, the mist, and the gorge was broken only by the faint sound of unseen water trickling down its rocky path to the small river in the gorge far below. The rock under Laurel's feet was as firm and everlasting as the mountains, but she knew it was wet and slimy from the dew. Every morning it was thus as she waited . . . waited. Slowly she knelt. Its rough surface scratched her knees, but she hardly felt it. Stretching out flat on her stomach, she began wriggling herself to the edge. The rock was cold and bits of wet moss adhered themselves to her bare arms and legs, but she crawled on paying no attention.

"Effen it's blooming' . . . effen it's bloomin'," she kept repeating to herself, breathing laboriously and ignoring the bleeding palm of her hand that left a path of blood on the rock.

Reaching the edge of the rock, she clutched its jagged edge and peered into the abyss. Her lungs expanded involuntarily in a hideous gasp. It was there, clinging precariously to the precipice, fifteen feet below, half obscured by the swirling mist that seeped up through the cracks in the rocks that surrounded it . . . the laurel bush. Instinctively Laurel drew herself away from the ledge, recoiling from the bush, yet at the same time feeling a sliver of cold fear pierce her body. At first she turned as if to run away, but an intangible force seemed to hold her back.

"I'll jet set hyar whar I cain't see it," she whispered.

The mist was disappearing as if by magic as the sun seeped through. A mocking bird sang gaily, heralding the morning and the spring.

"Whut ye singin' so purty about?" she asked the bird spitefully. "Onct ye had somethin' to sing about. Ye sang fer me an' Jeb. Hain't nothing' to sing about now. Jeb's gone." But the mocking bird sang on, heedless of Laurel.

"Guess ye're happy jest like th' laurel bush, hain't ye? Only ye didn't kill him like th' laurel bush."

She put her head in her arms. "Oh, Jeb, Jeb," she sobbed.

* * *

"Ye're just like yer name, Laurel," Jeb had said that day.

Laurel had smiled at him. Jeb was always saying things like that. He wasn't like the rest of the mountain men, fussing about crops and every-day things.

"This hyar's our place, Laurel. Cain't nobody bother us hyar. Hain't nobody hyar but ye 'n' me and th' mountains."

It was spring that day, too, and the laurel was blooming on the ledge, gay and taunting as it was today.

"Look, Laurel, th' first one to bloom," smiled Jeb as they leaned over the edge of the rock looking deep into the gorge. "I'll git it fer ye."

"Hain't no use in climbin' down thar, Jeb. They'll be some more an' 'sides, ye might fall."

Laurel could still hear Jeb as he laughed at her. "Fall? Why, I've been climbin' since I wuz knee high to a chipmunk. Jest ye stay right thar an' watch an' I'll show ye." His blue eyes twinkled as he sprang up and began the perilous descent.

Jeb was surefooted, but Laurel held her breath as he picked his way carefully down the rocky incline. "Come back, Jeb. Ye cain't make it!"

But Jeb hadn't answered. That's the way Jeb was. Once he started something, he meant to finish it. He made his way slowly, testing each rock carefully with his foot before he put his full weight upon it. Laurel breathed a sigh of relief as he reached the bush. Then she saw it. Part of the ledge where Jeb was standing was beginning to crack. "Jeb!" she called frantically. He looked up at her, but it was too late. The ledge cracked again, then broke completely away, leaving only the laurel bush swinging in the gay spring breeze.

Jeb had said only one word, "Laurel." It echoed and re-echoed against the rocks . . . Laurel . . . Laurel . . . Laurel . . . then was gone.

She had watched Jeb's body in horrible fascination as it first fell free then bounced against the sharp rocks; farther and farther it fell disappearing at last in the undergrowth and rocks that lay near the bottom.

"Jeb . . . Jeb . . . Jeb . . ." she called over and over, but only the wind in the pines answered.

Frantically she scrambled up the slope, catching hold to bushes and small trees. Finally she reached the cabin gasping and sobbing.

Pa had only shaken his head sadly when she told him. "Hain't no use, Laurel, honey. We'd go out thar, but ye know cain't nobody git to th' bottom of th' gulch." He patted her shoulder awkwardly and left her alone to weep silently in the bright spring sunshine. Pa couldn't help the way he was. That was the way all mountain men were . . . accepting fate silently . . . all except Jeb.

And so the spring passed and summer came. The pink blooms faded and withered on the laurel, but it was still green and alive, always there to remind her.

Sometimes Gran'pa tried to comfort her. "Perk up, Laurel, child. Hit ain't nacheral fer ye to act this way. Ye ain't got no color in yer cheeks no more." His faded old blue eyes gazed compassionately at her.

"I cain't stand it no more, Gran'pa. I got to git away. Away frum th' mountains and the laurel bushes."

"Ye cain't git away frum th' laurel honey. Thet's yer name an' ye're rooted hyar in th' mountains same as th' laurel. Yer soul's hyar an' ye draw yer life sap frum th mountain same as th' laurel. If ye pull up yer roots an' leave, ye'll die, but yer soul will be hyar in th' mountains always jest like th' laurel. An' chile, ye know whut happens to them thet dies without their souls."

"I don't believe none o' thet stuff, Gran'pa. Hit ain't so."

The old man only shook his head knowingly. "Hit's so, child. Ye'll be doomed . . . a demon to walk the 'arth, without no home an' without no soul."

At first Laurel stayed away from the rock and the gorge. But everywhere she went, the laurel bloomed, pink and white, mocking, blithe in the spring sunshine; glossily green in the summer.

Autumn, then winter came and the laurel lost its leaves. It was brown, withered, swaying stiffly in the cold wind. Sometimes it was enshrouded in a thin blanket of snow.

"Ye're dead now. Ye cain't hurt nobody." Laurel laughed at it as she stood on the rock, the stark bareness of winter surrounding her.

"I'll be back in the spring," the laurel always answered and she knew it was true.

"I won't ever have to see ye again. I'll be gone afore ye bloom again," she told it defiantly, yet desperately.

Yet somewhere deep inside her, Laurel knew that she would stay. She could always hear Gran'pa's voice . . . "Ye'll be doomed . . . a demon to walk the 'arth, without no home an' without no soul."

As February melted into March, Laurel waited, half dreading, half anticipating the first blossom of the mountain laurel.

"Maybe it won't bloom a-tall," she hopefully breathed to herself as she squirmed her way to the edge of the rock every morning in the mist and silence.

Soon little green shoots appeared on its boughs. "I told you I would be back," it scoffed. And so it came, budding and at last blooming.

"Ye're evil!" she cried bitterly. "Ye took Jeb. But ye cain't have me. I'll come out hyar till ye're all brown an' ugly an' dead. I'll laugh at ye then. Do ye hear?"

* * *

The sun rose higher, completely dissolving the mist. It shone on the first bloom of the mountain laurel and it shone on the solitary figure of a girl bent in despair. Laurel lifted her head. Slowly she rose, leaving the bush and the rock alone to dance and bask in the warm spring sun.

It was close to twilight when she returned. The sun was tipping the mountains across the gorge making them seem as if they were gloriously burning. It burnished the rock and tinted the pink blossoms on the laurel bush turning them bronze in its waning light. There was only the sound

of the early evening crickets. The smoky mist was rising again.

Once she thought she heard Jeb calling, but it was only the evening breeze whispering through the pines. Occasionally an owl called. When his voice died away, the silence was more profound than ever. There was no moon. A few solitary stars had pierced their way through the ebon infinity of night. Yet she could still see the laurel bush malevolently keeping watch in the dark obscurity of the precipice.

Then she heard it . . . a voice floating in the darkness. "Laurel . . . Laurel . . . Laurel . . ."

Straining her ears against the awful silence, she felt a thrill of strange excitement. Then it came again, slightly louder this time. "Laurel . . . Laurel . . ."

"It it ye, Jeb?" she called, her own voice echoing across the gorge.

The voice answered strongly and vibrantly and re-echoing against the rocks, resounding, then diminishing, "Laurel . . . Laurel . . . Laurel . . . Laurel . . ."

"I'm coming, Jeb," she called, a sob of happiness escaping from her throat.

Blindly she began the treacherous descent, oblivious of the briars and undergrowth that snatched at her clothing, vainly trying to hold her back. Instinctively she avoided the laurel bush, but as she passed it, she laughed. "Ye'll not bother me now. I'm leavin' ye fer ever. Jeb 'n' me's goin' away tergether, an' ye'll never find us."

The laurel didn't answer. It only nodded in the light breeze.

On and on she struggled, insensible to her bleeding arms and legs, stopping now and then to listen. The voice was still there, beckoning her onward.

"I'm comin', Jeb," she cried gasping.

Suddenly she felt herself falling or being lifted up, she didn't know which. A mingling of soft light and Jeb's voice engulfed her, then Jeb was there with her whispering her name, "Laurel . . . Laurel."

She smiled as he took her gently by the hand and led her into the infinity of nothingness.

The laurel was alone.

It bloomed riotously that spring. Soon summer came and the pink blossoms faded and dropped off as before. It browned and withered in the winter, but it always returned in the spring, laughing and dancing in the light spring air, drawing its life blood from the mountains.

People who count their eggs before they hatch usually end up with an omelet.—M. Hill.

I'm Gonna Be Rich

ONE-ACT PLAY

By JODY MANN

HESTER DOMINIQUE a girl of the Skillit
DAN DOMINIQUE her father, addicted to opium, and owner, so to
speak of the Florentine
SURE-FOOT CHARLIE the crippled bartender of the Florentine
RUBE LANGLEY a man of the Skillit
JOE LUPO a dealer in narcotics

SCENE I

(A back room behind the Florentine, the central of the three occupied by Dan and Hester Dominique. It is furnished with a makeshift poker table deeply scarred and burned by forgotten cigarettes, a half dozen or so straight chairs, a pot-bellied stove with its blackened pipe disappearing into the wall just above a crack in the plaster, a faded ill-stuffed chair, a cabinet, a lamp, and a hazy mirror. The hour is 7:00 p.m. When the bolt is lifted and the door at the rear of the room opened, a glimpse may be had of the bar, one of the four unoccupied billiard tables, the corners of several booths, and the door that gives onto the main street of the Skillit where swarms the evening traffic of the slums. In glimpsing the street it might be noticed that the atmosphere is foggy and probably heavy with smoke from the city disposal dump, and sulphur exhaust from the mill.)

(In the room, a swarthy, well-dressed gentleman is taking his leave of another man, obviously in his late forties, who reclines in the ill-stuffed chair rhythmically turning a white box over and over in his hands. They eye each other slyly, yet not antagonistically, and the swarthy man spits out words from behind a Cuban cigar.)

JOE: Still no, eh, Dan? You won't take me up on the deal? *(He strides about the room with indifference, chewing the Cuban cigar. An amused smile plays about the corners of his mouth as Dan answers.)*

DAN: What deal? Give ya' Hester for this? *(He shakes the box at Joe, then snatches it back more closely to him.)* What for, Joe? You're gettin' your money.

JOE: Okay. You're the boss, I always say. It's just a suggestion—thinking of course of other things your money could buy. You know, it's not to every customer Joe Lupo offers a steady supply of opium in exchange for a daughter. Nice deal. You ought to consider it more.

DAN: Keep your money, Joe. There'll be more where that came from.

JOE: *(He shrugs, still smiling)* It's all the same to me. *(He extinguishes the*

cigar in an ashtray on the table, doffs his hat with mock courtesy, and swaggers toward the door.)

DAN: Pullin' out tonight?

JOE: Yeah—for Frisco. The fog smells better out there. Oh, give this to Hester. Tell her it's straight from the Golden Gate. So long, Dan. *(He tosses a small package carelessly onto the table, lifts the latch on the door, and departs, still to be heard hailing the bartender—then silence.)*

(Dan sits quietly for a moment, then heaves himself up from the ill-stuffed chair with one hand to his forehead as though it ached. He searches the four shelves of the cabinet. Finding only a cold biscuit and a single strip of limp bacon, he shoves them into his mouth, and swallows with difficulty. Then, picking up the package off the table, and shoving the ash tray with its cigar butt far back into the cabinet, he walks stiffly out the door on the left. The room is empty. The door from the street can be heard opening and banging shut again. Hurried footsteps pound across the barroom, and a girl flings open the door to the back room, glances swiftly about it, and shakes her head uncertainly. Her hair, dyed to a yellow blond, is blown and tangled from the wind, and a tattered coat envelopes her body—slim almost to thinness. She turns, and calls into the empty bar.)

HESTER: Charlie! Ya' there? *(Sure-Foot Charlie limps toward her wiping his hands on the white apron fastened clumsily about him. It is difficult to suppose his age, for at times he seems almost decrepit, but his face is not burdened with wrinkles or sags.)*

CHARLIE: I'm here, Hester. You wantin' somethin'? *(He props against the doorway, and Hester moves into the room slinging her coat across the chair.)*

HESTER: Seen anybody around lately? Today? In the last couple of hours? *(Her voice is sharp.)*

CHARLIE: Like who, Hester?

HESTER: *(She whirls around defiantly as if to question him further, then stops.)* Skip it. I just thought I seen somebody, that's all. Get me some of Dan's money out of the register, will ya'? I gotta buy meat. Reckon we ain't got no bread either.

CHARLIE: Can't Hester. Dan took it out two—maybe three days ago. Ain't done much business since, and I gotta keep a little change on hand.

HESTER: *(collapsing in a chair by the table)* Yeah. Yeah, I know.

CHARLIE: *(watching her silently for a moment)* I can give ya' some, Hester. Buck maybe. Your credit's good with me.

HESTER: *(looking up with a half smile)* That's real nice of ya', Charlie. I'll be returning all the money ya' give me—real soon too. Set yourself down here. *(motions toward a chair)* Nobody's in the bar, and I—I wanna talk to ya'. *(Charlie complies after one glance of reassurance)*

into the empty room beyond, settling himself easily across the table from her, and fumbling beneath the apron for a smashed pack of cigarettes. Hester leans toward him secretively.) What'd ya' say if I came in one day, and handed you enough money to get yer own place? Have yer own bar way off somewhere? What you say to that, Charlie?

CHARLIE: (*with a cynical smile*) I'd say you're nuts, Hester Dominique. I ain't seen no trees like that lately. Money just don't come that way around here. Besides, I wouldn't take it from you if ya' had it. What'd I want with my own bar as long as this 'un's here to work at?

HESTER: Listen to me, Charlie! Don't talk that way! (*She bends across the table to clutch his greasy shirt sleeves.*) I mean what I say! I'm gonna have money—lots of it! I'm leavin', Charlie—gettin' out of this place!

CHARLIE: (*softly*) Are ya', Hester? Out of the Skillit?

HESTER: (*releasing his sleeves, and stepping backward from the table*) Why do ya' say it that way—like—like somethin' was gonna stop me? I ain't scared. I'm gettin' me a job, I think, Charlie—out of the Skillit too. Rich folks on the Hill that can get me where I'm aimin'!

CHARLIE: Where are ya' aimin', Hester?

HESTER: (*eyeing Charlie resentfully, and coming slowly forward to lean intently in his face*) I ain't easily satisfied, Sure-Foot Charlie, and I'll tell ya'—it ain't the first fireplace on the other side of the mill. It'll take a while. I ain't rushin' things. Just long enough to save a little, and still pay for . . . (*She stops as though unwilling to go on, and her gaze lowers defensively.*)

CHARLIE: Joe Luppó's Cuban cigars, Hester?

HESTER: (*She glares for a moment, then begins to pace the floor.*) That's what I mean, Charlie! It'll take time—a month, maybe two—but I know what I'm doin'! What if I have got opium to pay for? I'll make enough money for that, and more besides. Listen to me, Charlie—I know what's over there on the other side of the mill. I know there's houses with fifteen rooms in 'em, and carpets as soft as a bowl of mashed potatoes. And there's women got diamonds on all ten fingers cause some man got the idea money burns your hands. (*She stops.*) I wouldn't know, Charlie, but I will know. I'll make it burn too. Take my word for it—Hester Dominique's gonna hit the top!

CHARLIE: (*quietly*) I hear ya', Hester. There's one thing though you'll never get away from. You know, the same fire that warms the Skillit—it warms you too. You'll freeze without it.

HESTER: (*preening before the hazy mirror*) You don't make sense, and I ain't gonna listen to ya'. Why don't ya' say it plain outright—you don't think I got the guts to get away! You'll see, Charlie, 'cause I'm on my way now. Right now!

(*Through the door standing ajar, a customer is seen entering from the murky street, and glancing about for Charlie.*)

CHARLIE: Business up front. (*rises with a nod to the gentleman at the bar.*)

HESTER: Yeah—I—uh—thanks for the dough. Guess I won't be needin' your handouts after I'm gone. Even then, though—I'll be around home from time to time.

CHARLIE: Sure Hester. Sure. *(with the same cynical smile. The door closes. Hester eyes herself in the hazy mirror from every angle, and, pleased with what she sees, departs through the door on the right. In the bar, the sound of voices deepens for the hour is advancing.)*

CURTAIN

SCENE II

(The same room; the time, four hours later, nearing midnight. From the bar beyond, the rattle and crash of chairs pierces the wall into the back room accompanied by the crack of billiard balls meeting headlong, and peals of raucous laughter. As a heavy fist pounds the door from the bar, Hester hurries into the room. Her hair is combed down smoothly, and fresh make-up gleams heavily on her face. She lifts the latch and opens the door only enough to identify the person demanding entrance.)

HESTER: Naw. Dan ain't here. I don't where he is. *(The man's voice cannot be heard, but Hester answer's him impatiently.)* I ain't waitin' tables no more. Now get along with you, Mac! *(She slams the door suddenly in his face, and the latch falls into place only to quiver with another knock—more gentle. She hesitates, then slips back the latch again.)*

HESTER: Who's there? *(The door is forced open wider, and Rube Langley enters, quietly closing it behind him. He is tall and slightly stoop-shouldered; neatly, if gaudily, dressed. His face is somewhat sullen, but not displeasing.)*

RUBE: It's just me, Hester. Why aren't you workin' tonight? I figured you'd stepped out on me maybe.

HESTER: I quit, that's why. *(sharply)*

RUBE: Well, you can still have a drink with me. Come on out. *(He grasps her arm tilting his head in the direction of the bar, and she struggles to free herself.)*

HESTER: Let go, Rubel! I say let go!

RUBE: Come on, Hester. Just one beer. Nobody's gonna bother ya' with me there. *(His voice is smooth like silk, and assuring.)*

HESTER: *(jerking away)* You heard me say no, didn't ya'? I ain't takin' orders from you no more—you or nobody else! *(She half stumbles backward, putting the table between herself and Rube Langley, rubbing her shoulder where a muscle had pulled. The man remains leaning negligently against the door with both hands in his pockets.)*

RUBE: You're through waitin' tables, and you won't be sociable. What's gotten into you anyway, Hester? You act like the Florentine'll bite!

HESTER: Get out, Rube. I gotta see about Pa!

RUBE: Don't hand me that. You just said he wasn't here, and if he was

Dan Dominique don't need a daughter when he's floatin' in opium smoke.

HESTER: (*gripping a chair as if to hurl it across the table into his face*)

Did you see Joe Lupo today?

RUBE: Sure, I saw him. Did you?

HESTER: In here, Rube? (*Hester waits without moving a muscle, and Rube takes his time—then answers.*)

RUBE: No. For all I know, he hasn't been here. Snap out of it, Hester! You've been through this before. Let's have a drink—just me and you. (*starts toward her*)

HESTER: Stay where ya' are Rube. I ain't goin' out there—tonight or any other night. Yeah, I'll tell ya' why. It's because I'm through with the whole business. I'm working a new job tomorrow, Rube—a swell job—plenty of dough. It's on the Hill to be exact. I'm gettin' away from this —(*curling her lip at the surroundings*) The Florentine—the stinkin' mill—the whole Skillit!

RUBE: (*stops advancing, and slouches into a chair, taking in her words without changing his expression*) Well-I-I, well-I-I. Serving champagne to lispin' bank presidents, I guess. Tidyin' milady's hair in the fifth floor salon. So you think you're too good for the Skillit, eh, Hester? (*sneers*) That's all I want to know. (*ambles toward the door still laughing*)

HESTER: Just wait, Rube! You can laugh now, but you won't dare when I've gotten what I want. I'm gonna be rich! (*She picks up the coat left slung over a chair, and shrugs into it. Rube watches her mockingly.*)

RUBE: Okay, kid. See ya' in the next world. Maybe we'll even shoot some crap. Going somewhere?

HESTER: I ain't puttin' on my coat for the hell of it. Got business at the market.

RUBE: Want me to walk ya'?

HESTER: (*giving the kerchief a final jerk under her chin*) What do ya' think I'm scared of? I can walk by myself!

RUBE: (*smirking*) Sure ya' can, Hester. That's the Skillit in ya'. A lady on the Hill wouldn't dare.

HESTER: It's a lie! A damn filthy lie! (*She screams at the door already closed behind Rube, and, starting to follow, checks herself—going out the door on the right that leads ultimately to an alley and the Skillit drag.*)

CURTAIN

SCENE III

(*The same room a short time later. Dan Dominique is seated in the ill-stuffed chair absently caressing the curved stem of an orange pipe. Hester enters from the door on the right through which she departed. Dan does not turn around.*)

DAN: Is that you, Hester?

HESTER: Yes, Pa. (*She walks across the room to bestow a sack of food*

gingerly on the table, testing the air carefully with sniffs. She smiles at Dan.)

DAN: That's a good girl, Hester. Limberger?

HESTER: No cheese this time, Dan. You can put up the toilet water. Set tight now, and let me wash up. *(reaches into the cabinet for the soap and finds an ashtray filled with ashes and the butts of two Cuban cigars carelessly shoved on the lower shelf. She whirls on Dan.)* He's been here! He's been here again, Dan Dominique!

HESTER: *(shaking her fist at him, and slinging the cigars—tray and all—into the pot-bellied stove)* You know who I mean! That stinkin' tramp Joe Lupo can keep outa this house, do ya' hear me? He's a thief! He might as well leave own the place cause he gets all the money! Why do ya' do it, Dan? It's gonna kill ya', don't ya' know? Put down the pipe, please, Pa, please! *(She sinks down at his feet.)*

DAN: Hush, Hester. It won't do any good. *(patting her head, and reaching with the other hand into his shirt pocket)* Joe brung ya' a present—all the way from the Golden Gate. He likes ya'.

HESTER: You give me the creeps when you say that. Look here here—you ain't payin' no mind to him, are ya', Dan? I got nothin' to do with him. I don't want his—what'd he bring?

HESTER: *(after tearing off the wrapping that surrounds the small vial of perfume, fondling it appraisingly for a moment, and lifting it to her nose)* I hate him! I despise him! Smell it—just once! Never mind. I'll tell you what it's like. Opium! Just as sickening sweet and drunkenin' as your pipe! *(throws the bottle against the wall, and watches burst—then leaps to her feet)* Listen to what I say, Dan. I won't stay here another day!

DAN: *(quietly)* Why, Hester?

HESTER: *(pacing the floor again)* Why? Because it's rotten, that's why! The same old thing of a day in and day out with nothin' to wait for, nothin' to expect but the everlastin' fog, and Joe Lupo! I'm gonna make a life for myself, Dan, and you're not gonna stop me. I got a job next week—on the Hill, the Hill, see? And if things go right it'll last a lot longer. Are you listenin' to me, Dan? The Barkers—yeah, Mr. Emory Barker's throwin' a party so big it's takin' a week to get things fixed, and a million people to do it. I answered the ad, Dan. I got the job. I'm gonna have money! Clothes! Pretty rings and things, and perfume that'd make Rube Langley drunk!

DAN: What's the use, Hester? You won't want all that.

HESTER: You're damn crazy! Trouble with you is, you don't know there's another world outside the Skillit—a real world like in books. You think you can keep me here, Dan, so's I'll never know it's there, but I'm twenty-one now. I got brains. I'm gettin' out 'fore you kill me like ya' did Ma!

DAN: *(His expression changes for a moment to a cold glare, then softens again into the same placid emptiness.)* I never killed your Ma, Hester.

HESTER: Well, what did then if it wasn't you and the Skillit and never

no money? You don't just die natural at twenty-five!

DAN: All right, Hester. Maybe you killed her. She never got strong again after you was born.

HESTER: (*aghast*) No! (*drops down beside him again*) You hate me, don't ya', Pa?

DAN: Hate you, Hester? Why should I hate ya'? You're the only thing in the world that's really mine to love. You're all I got.

HESTER: I'm gonna get ya' more, Pa, just wait and see. As soon as I . . .

DAN: Hester . . . don't think there's a Hill for you. There's no other world but here. I know.

HESTER: I know there is, Pa. Don't try to stop me. I'm going tomorrow.

DAN: Sure, you are.

(*Dan pats her head, letting one hand trail down the blond hair that tumbles about her shoulders. Then reaching beneath the cushion of the ill-stuffed chair, he pulls out a box, takes a white pellet from it, and slowly raising the pipe to his lips, ambles stiffly through the door on the left. Hester's head sinks down onto the chair.*)

CURTAIN

SCENE IV

(*The same room two weeks later. It is late afternoon, and Hester enters quickly from the door on the right. She dances across the room to deposit her coat and kerchief on the table, and smiles confidently into the hazy mirror. Charlie is singing in the bar beyond. She lifts the latch, and throws open the door, calling cheerfully.*)

HESTER: Well, Charlie, things in the Skillit same as usual? (*She stands aside for him to limp into the room. Before sitting down, he eyes her quizzically.*)

CHARLIE: Yeah Hester. Why should they be? Don't it look the same to you every night?

HESTER: (*laughing*) What makes you think I ain't stayin' nights at the Barker place?

CHARLIE: You don't have to show your face for me to know you're here, Hester. I know. You've been here every night—right back here.

HESTER: (*laughing again more nervously*) Yeah, Charlie, I guess things look the same. Ain't took much notice here lately 'cept the mill smellin' worse. I got too much else to think about. Ain't ya' noticed nothin' different—about me? (*raising the arm that boasts a silver bracelet to her hair*)

CHARLIE: Yeah, Hester. You got circles under your eyes. How long ya' been workin' up there?

HESTER: (*smirking*) Two weeks, thanks and I feel fine. Mr. Barker kept me on after the society party was over like I was aimin'. Remember, Charlie? I told ya' where I was aimin'. Like my new jewels? Reckon they're diamonds sure 'nuff. (*flashes the bracelet before his eyes*)

CHARLIE: (*smiling cynically*) They're diamonds, Hester, if that's what

you want 'em to be. Barker give 'em to you?

HESTER: (*sliding onto the table, and crossing her knees easily*) Not the old man, Charlie—young Mr. Barker, Mr. Stockton Barker. He's takin' over the old man's business. Told me so one afternoon in the kitchen—how he's goin' over yonder to Paris in his own boat. He's awful rich, and you know somethin' else? (*leaning down, and taking the cigarette from Charlie's fingers*)

CHARLIE: What, Hester?

HESTER: He's takin' me with him. Said so yesterday when he gave me my jewels. They got earrings to match—there's proof for ya'.

CHARLIE: Dan know 'bout this?

HESTER: Sure. All about it. He just smiles like I was kiddin' or somethin'. I reckon I sure played Stockton right. Gee, Charlie, would you ever have thought when I was sportin' Rube Langley that someday I'd live on the Hill—and drink champagne—and—and go places in them big boats? (*laughs*) I told ya' I was smart—that I'd get away. Well, I have—already. You know, Charlie, I can already feel satin against my skin, and—

CHARLIE: How much have they paid ya', Hester?

HESTER: Huh? Well—just ten bucks, but Stockton told me there was ninety more comin', and he brings me presents a lot. He's comin' out to take me dancin' one evenin'.

CHARLIE: When, Hester?

HESTER: He didn't say. Why? Don't frown, Charlie. I'll come back to see ya' sometime. It ain't as though I'll be gone for good.

CHARLIE: I know, Hester. Not for good.

HESTER: (*glancing up as the door from the street opens*) That must be Dan. Don't give up, Charlie. Someday you'll have your own place out there somewhere. All ya' gotta do is go.

CHARLIE: Sure, Hester. Sure. (*rises to leave, passing Dan in the doorway*) Evenin', Dan.

HESTER: I'll be interreckly, Pa. Reckon there might be some stuff advertised in the paper I'll be needin' to buy. You know—pretty dresses. What about red, Pa? You always liked red. I can't wait'll ya' see Stockton. He sure looks swell. Done told ya' that though, I reckon, weeks ago. Wait'll ya' see the kind of woman I'll be when we git married—no more pinchin' for money—(*whirls back into the room, and stops when Dan does not look up. The paper is open on his lap.*)

DAN: Come here, Hester, and find your red dress. It's right here—cheap. (*She takes the paper from his hands, and reads.*)

HESTER: (*laughing*) You know what it says, Dan? Ha! SOCIETY BELLE WEDS HEIR TO MARKER FORTUNE. You don't believe it, do ya'? It ain't so! He's comin' for me, Dan—maybe tonight! He's gonna marry me—me! Don't you think I heard him say it! Me! Hester Dominique! (*laughs again hysterically, and tears the paper into shreds*)

DAN: Stop it, Hester. Papers don't lie. Men do.

HESTER: (*screaming*) Not him! He told me! He loves me, and he's takin' me outa here—outa the Skillit 'cause I don't belong. He said so, Dan. He did. (*Her voice gets weaker. Leaning toward the table for support, she slips and crumples to the floor sobbing. Dan watches a moment, making no more to stop her tears, then, with the same awkward amble, he crosses to her, and lifts her up. At first she struggles half-heartedly, then allows herself to be quieted beneath his stroking, soothing hand.*)

DAN: Now I can tell you, Hester, why you'll never get away—why there's no other world for ya' but the Skillit. Listen to me, Hester—every word. (*she nods*) You don't know what hate is till you walk past the mill, and mingle with the gents that're choosy 'bout their friends. The Skillit don't turn nobody out, Hester. It's warm and peaceable to any that wants to enter. You know that now, don't ya', Hester?

HESTER: Yes, Pa.

DAN: And once you come in, you stay till you die, and take what the wind blows cause it's never too much. Filth? Sure, but it don't cheat ya' none. Broke? Yeah—all the time, but what does it matter when there's nothin' ya' wanta buy?

HESTER: No, Pa. You don't need no money.

DAN: You gotta forget there's places like the Hill cause they're never gonna want ya' there. It's like an egg, Hester, clean and pure-like in the shell before you crack it. But when it hits the Skillit, and soaks up the grease, it'll never be pure no more. It's better that way too.

HESTER: Yes, Pa. (*She gets up weakly, and stumbles—catching sight of herself in the hazy mirror. She cocks her head at an angle and fingers her blond hair*) He said I was pretty. Stockton said it. Why should he . . .

DAN: He didn't mean just that, Hester. He hadn't got eyes to see what's pretty in you—like what's pretty in the Skillit. They're the same—just the same. He'd think your hair was too yellow.

HESTER: What do ya' mean? I use the best dye there is!

DAN: Sure you do, Hester. It's pretty to me. You're the best lookin' woman in the Skillit. They know it. You can tell they know it.

HESTER: (*smiling uncertainly—then assuredly*) Yeah, Dan. I kinda feel it too. Listen. You hear it? The crowd's good tonight, and business'll be better if Hester's waitin' tables. That's right—ain't it, Dan?

(*Dan Dominique's only answer is a smile. Hester smooths her hair before the hazy mirror, and applies fresh make-up—then flings open the door to the bar, and walks in. Dan lifts a flaming match to the bowl of his pipe, draws several times, and a circle of opium smoke rises to blend with the stuffy air.*)

THE END

She's the type I wouldn't trust an unopened letter in the room with.
—M. Hill.

Come Back, Come Back

By SARA THURSTON

A chair scraped. A head or two looked up. Then silence again. The library reading room, usually warm and alive with enthusiasm of working people, was cold and indifferent. Instead of the fervor of scratching pencils, there was a restless flicking of pages and heavy sighs. Eyes turned to the window—then painfully, as if called, returned to an open page. Someone coughed. Yet, the library was quiet—a dull quiet that draped itself over a struggling, beckoning spirit, trying to smother its breath. A struggling spirit which, in a whisper, seemed to sigh, "Come back, come back." What was it trying to do—pull drifting thoughts back to open books and force them to concentrate there?

". . . the mycelium of a basidiospore has a vast number of sporangium located in the . . ." Kate's eyes blurred. The lamp on the table caught a glare on her glasses making her squint. She couldn't study; she didn't remember a thing she had read. She looked up, then down, and ". . . of a basidiospore has a vast. . ." Why couldn't she study? Her mind would stray off, and then something would snatch it back. What was wrong? It was quiet in the room; there was no noise; there was no movement. Biology and—oh, why had she argued so with Joan, her roommate? Why hadn't she been patient instead of snapping? And of all the silly things to fuss about—closet. Why had she said those things, those ugly remarks? It she had only held her tongue and tried to . . . She bit her lip. Something seemed to call, "Come back, come back." But Joan . . . "Come back." Her eyes returned to her book.

Lucy looked miserably at her paper. "The Egyptian Empire was divided into eight. . ." Everything blurred and a tear slid unchecked down her cheek. Why doesn't Mother call? Daddy's operation should have been over hours ago. Did something go wrong? What if . . . no, she mustn't think about it. He'd always said not to cross bridges. Why, she even remembered when she was only a little girl and . . . "Come back," an intruding voice pleaded. But why doesn't Mother call. . . The Egyptian Empire was divided into . . ."

Margaret put her pencil on the table. She ran her hand over the new gold watch. Today was the best birthday of all—and just think, a watch from Jimmy! Just wait until she could show it to Ann. Why, in another year, he might even ask her to . . . "Come back," something teased, "Come back." Margaret picked up her pencil. A new watch—and a Bulova!

Helen's long, slender fingers tapped gently on the top of her English book. Who in the world was the author of "The Solitary Reaper"? Oh, yes, William Wordsworth. She could remember that. She looked at her fingers. Darn. An English test, and there was the new Beethoven sonata waiting on the piano. A tender feeling—a desire to express—came over her hands. She could be memorizing the Tschaikowsky concerto, too. Oh,

if she were the chosen one—to play it with an orchestra in Atlanta! If she could just go now, to the piano, and play the middle part over once. "Come back," something ordered. Oh, the English test—yes, but the Beethoven sonata was waiting.

Carol erased the equation. " $2x$ plus $4y$ equals—" Equals what? Oh, well, she was tired. She'd get it in the morning. In the morning her mind would be clear. Now she had to think—to think about Hugh. She rubbed her fourth finger uneasily. No, the ring was not there anymore. The big, gold class ring was gone—just like Hugh was. Oh, Hugh, and she thought he had loved her! No more letters—no more happy hours to look forward to. Hugh's last letter telling her about Ruth was like a haze. The ring was gone—in Hugh's mailbox by now. No more rings—no more Hugh's. "Come back," a voice sobbed. " $2x$ plus $4y$ equals" . . . equals . . . Oh, Hugh!

* * *

A book fell. Someone got and tiptoed awkwardly across the room. There was a sigh. A page flipped. Eyes turned to the window. A chair scraped. "Come back . . . come back . . ."
